

# My Crisis, My Faith, & My Faithful God!

Heb 11:1, 9-14; Gn 23:1-20 (text)

2 May 2021, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am  
(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

## Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

You & I class ourselves as believers, don't we?

Well, is it not so that, at times of temptation or hardship, even *believers* – yes also you & I – may experience some moments of doubt!?

Thus, it happens that, at times, even the believer asks (at least thinks of) questions like...

- God, are You aware of our crisis-situation?
- Why do You not intervene?
- God, is it really so that Jesus is the only way to You?
- God, is it really so that heaven is our actual “*homeland*” being prepared for us?

My brother & sister,

Abraham, a believer just like you & I, also had his crises. Granted, his crises were *different* to ours, yet, nevertheless they were still *doubt-working* crises; crises which caused also Abraham to particularly wonder whether God would ever fulfil His promises re a future *homeland* for Abraham and his offspring!

Well, by way of the following three points, our Bible text gives us good answers.

Here are the three points:

- My Crisis
- My Faith (in Action)
- God is Faithful (to His promises)

## My Crisis

Look, is it not so that verses 1 & 2 tells us that a crisis arose for Abraham!?

I mean, is it not so that God had promised: “Abraham, to *you* and your offspring I will give this very land in which you are now just a sojourner – as your everlasting possession”?<sup>1</sup>

“...*to you*...!”

However, at the time of our text, still not a single piece of that Promised Land belonged to Abraham.

And here is Abraham's crisis: the very man who has received God's promise re that same land becoming a homeland for him and his offspring – this very man's wife, Sarah, has now died.

On which piece of earth will he now bury his wife?

I mean, Abraham does not yet own a single stretch of that Promised Land.

You see, even today – although only for a season – you & I still purchase that small piece of land in a cemetery where we bury our loved-ones.

---

<sup>1</sup> cf. e.g. Gn 17:8 “**And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.**” ( וְנָתַתִּי לָךְ וּלְיִרְעֶיךָ אֶת־אֶרֶץ אֲנֹכִי אֶת־אֶרֶץ ) ( מִגְרִיבֶיךָ אֶת כָּל־אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן לְאֻחֻזַּת עוֹלָם וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים: )

But in Abraham's day, it was normal to do what my grandparents did. You see, my "Oupa" & "Ouma" owned a farm in South Africa. And on that farm – yes, not in a communal cemetery in town, but right on their farm land which they *legally possessed* – my grandparents had fenced off a section which they allocated for their family cemetery. There, on their land *which they owned*, they buried their children who died in infancy and there also they themselves were finally buried. Their graves are still there today! Thus, gauging by what was normal practise, Abraham *had* to own a piece of land where he could bury his dear wife.

However, there was an even better reason as to why Abraham had to possess a piece of that land where he was sojourning.

I mean, would it not be so that if Abraham could own a small piece of that land as his very special *possession*, that *that small possession* would serve as firstfruits of God's promise!?

What promise?

Well, the promise that *that whole land of Canaan* would later on, in God's time, become Abraham's *possession for ever!*<sup>2</sup>

But here's a crisis! Sarah has just died, and Abraham does not yet own a single piece of that Promised Land!

In fact, as verse 4 says, Abraham was still ***an alien and stranger*** in that exact same land! So, here's the crisis for Abraham's faith: "Will my God stick to His word?" "Will He at this stage allow for me to purchase just one small piece of Canaan's land as my treasured possession – yes, even if it's just a cave – yes, a cave which could serve as those firstfruits of God's promise that this whole land would one day be an *everlasting possession* to me & my offspring?"

"Will God help me?"

"Will He be faithful to His covenant (contractual) promise to me?"

Well thus would have been Abraham's thoughts as he was mulling his crisis over in his head.

My brother & sister, is it not true that you & I, too, have our doubt-raising crises?

I mean, you & I might look at evil in society. Yes, ...

- we might stare at the moral collapse of society – a society that has by and largely rejected the God of the Bible;
- we might stare at the current pandemic, which – as grim reaper – is taking the lives of thousands of people worldwide;
- or we might be scared of climate change;
- then, in our pluralistic society, we might hear popular slogans such as: "Christ is not the only way to God, but all religions are leading to God!"
- on top of all these, we might look at our personal crises of ill health, pain, loneliness and relationship strains

And, overwhelmed by these, even the believer (you & I) may at times, just like Abraham, wonder, "Why does God not intervene?" "What about *our* Promised Land?" "Yes, what about that new earth which the meek have been promised to inherit (Mt 5:5); yes, the new

---

<sup>2</sup> Gn 17:8 "...everlasting possession..." (עוֹלָם תַּרְחֻמָּה).

heavens and new earth in which, God’s Word says, righteousness will dwell” (2 Pt 3:13)?<sup>3</sup>

Well, *so* it was with Abraham: “Will God not perhaps give me just one sign – just one act – by which He shows that He is still aware of His promise that this whole land will one day be my homeland – my eternal possession!?”

Crisis!

Well, this brings us to point 2 in the sermon...

### **My Faith in Action**

Look! Verse 3 says, Abraham rose from beside his dead wife!

Why?

Well, because Abraham has a God-prompted plan!

Yes, seeing that he is still an alien & stranger in that land, he would approach the landowners in that Southern part of Canaan where Sarah had died.

At that time, those landowners were some Hittite people.

And now, in God-prompted faith, Abraham wants to see whether he could purchase land – even if it’s just the size of the Machpelah<sup>4</sup> cave belonging to a Hittite man called Ephron!

After all, Machpelah was so ideally situated – right at the *end* of Ephron’s land, which means that, if that cave could become a burial place for Abraham’s family, Abraham & his family would not have to walk over too much of Ephron’s field if they wanted to come to the cave.

So, in his crisis (and, no doubt, prayerfully), Abraham embarked on a plan!

Yes, verse 10 tells us Abraham went to the city gate – i.e., *a legal court of law* – to negotiate with the Hittites of Kiriath Arba.<sup>5</sup>

And, look! Because Abraham was a man of God, he was polite – he showed courtesy; he bowed down (v.7, 12).

Then, in God-prompted faith, in hope and expectation, Abraham frankly asked, “***Sell me some property for a burial site so I can bury my dead!***” (v.4b).

Then?

How did the Hittites answer? Did they instantly say, “Yes, Sir, the price is fifty/hundred shekels!”?

No! So easy was it not!

Instead, just look at the faith-testing reply Abraham now receives: “Sir, you don’t have to buy land from us!” “Just bury your dead in one of our tombs!” “***None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead!***” (v.6).

My brother & sister, it’s like some unbeliever comes to you & me exactly at the time when we, in the midst of a faith crisis, are wondering about God’s promises re our homeland – heaven!

Yes, it’s like an unbeliever comes at such critical moment and tells us (as they do!!),

- “Forget about God!!”
- “Forget about eternal life!”

---

<sup>3</sup> ***But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.***

<sup>4</sup> מַכְפֶּלֶה whose meaning (gauging by the Septuagint’s translation τὸ διπλοῦν ) might have been “The Double One” from διπλοῦς, ἦ, οὖν “double,” or (as Gesenius, W. in his *Thesaurus Linguae Hebraeae* suggests) from the Ethiopian word ሞክፈልት (*makfalt*) which means, “part, lot, portion” (cf. BDB).

<sup>5</sup> Kiriath Arba (עַרְבַת אַרְבָּה = “City of Arba” [***Arba who was the greatest man among the Anakites***, cf. Josh 14:15]). Later on Kiriath Arba became Hebron.

- “Forget about receiving from God a future homeland as your eternal possession!”
- “Man, forget all that airy-fairy stuff!”
- “There is no eternal life!”
- “Just enjoy life here with us!”
- “Come on, ‘she’ll be right, mate’!”
- “Just be one of us!”

Indeed, the Hittites’ answer to Abraham said as much as: “Ah man, Abraham, forget about purchasing land!”

“Why would you want to possess land here?”

“Come on, Abraham, you’re not perhaps hoping to one day own this whole country, hey?”

“Come now!” “You don’t have to *own* the piece of land in which your dead wife will rest!” “Just use one of our burial places!”

Of course, what the Hittites did not know was that Abraham’s God – the only true God – had promised that entire Canaanite country to Abraham and his offspring! And what Abraham was now seeking in great faith from God, was that God would give to him just the Machpelah-cave as firstfruits/down-payment of that whole land!

The Hittites didn’t know that – couldn’t foresee that!

But Abraham knew that!

So, even though the Hittites gave Abraham a hollow answer, still Abraham’s God-worked faith persisted.

Yes, he asked them again – this time mentioning again politely yet by name, the cave of *Machpelah*, Ephron’s cave (v.7-9)

And this time Ephron himself answered! And the way he answers is yet again a faith-tester for Abraham (v.11): “***No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the sight of the sons of my people I give it to you. Bury your dead.***”

Wow, from the context of our passage<sup>6</sup> it is clear that Ephron was ready to just *give* the cave – but not just the cave; no, now also the *field* – to Abraham!

What a faith-tester!

Why? I mean, is the result of *getting land for free* versus *getting land at a price*, not the same? Free or purchased, will not that land be your possession?

No! Not quite!

You see, Abraham knew: He must become the *undisputed* owner of that field and cave so that no-one in future could take that piece of land back from him.

Indeed, this field & cave must become his lawful possession – the real firstfruits of God’s promise that all of that Canaanite country would become Abraham’s everlasting possession!

So, taking that field & cave for nothing from the Hittites would be the easy way out – a way that would show no trust in God’s promise to let Abraham legally *possess* the land!

My brother & sister, *Abraham’s* faith was tested by *Ephron* the Hittite.

---

<sup>6</sup> Although the Hebrew word for “give” (נָתַן) can also at times mean “sell,” verse 12 sheds light on its use in v.11. Indeed, from v.12 it is clear that Abraham said he would not just want the property be “given” to him, but that he would rather buy it at the right price (literally, “I will give the silver of/for the field” = נָתַתִּי כֶסֶף (הַשָּׂדֶה). Also cf. v.9 “...Ask him to sell it to me for the full price as a burial among you” ( בְּכֶסֶף מָלֵא יִתְּנֶנָּה לִּי ) ( בְּתוֹכְכֶם לְאַחֲזֵת-קֶבֶר )

But tell me, who's *your* "Hittite?" Yes, who's the one who, amidst all life's crises, comes and throws faith-testing comments & suggestions at you?

You see, for more than a decade, my "Hittite" was an atheist friend who used to ring me twice per month; who often (and with great cynicism) used to tell me that the whole New Testament is just fairy tales – that there will be no homeland for believers in future; yes, that there's no life after death – that, when life on this earth is over, we will all just be zipped into non-existence!

Well, God in His grace, has always upheld my faith in Christ. He has always directed my thoughts back to the self-evidencing character of His Word; and always back to two facts:

- 1) that gauging by the intelligent design in creation, the Almighty God's existence is obvious;
- 2) that of all "gods" that earth-dwellers worship, God-Triune with His self-sacrificial love clearly stands out as the only true One!

Well, look what new faith tester Ephron *now* throws at Abraham!

You see, in great slyness, Ephron now suddenly asks an exorbitant amount for that cave & field – *400 shekels of silver* just for a field & cave!

I mean, compared with the *mere 50 shekels of silver* which David would, later on, pay to Arauna as purchase price for a whole threshing floor and oxen,<sup>7</sup> Ephron is asking a whole lot!

Yet, by God's grace, Abraham was able to pay such a hefty price.

So, as v. 16 says, "***Abraham listened to Ephron, and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver...***"

Yes, Abraham paid it all!

Thus, Abraham's God-worked & God-upheld faith proved to be victorious.

My brother & sister, this is true for every person who plans & lives his/her life on God's terms and for His glory! God will uphold your faith!

Well, now, having in God's grace been successful in the purchase of that small piece of land – that firstfruits of what was to come – what would have gone through Abraham's mind?

This question brings us to the 3<sup>rd</sup> (last) point...

### **God Is Faithful (to His Promises)**

You see, Abraham's heart was now rejoicing, because, in God's providence, Abraham has successfully purchased that piece of land with the cave – small piece – yet firstfruits of what was to come – that Abraham's offspring would one day own that entire country!! And look, the Lord made sure – through the God-worked faith that He had kept alive in Abraham – that *that whole transaction* took place in a legal court of law – yes, as it was in those days, in the city gate (v.10), and in front of witnesses! After all, at least five times

---

<sup>7</sup> cf. 2 Sm 24:24 ***But the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing."*** So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

However, also cf. 1 Chr 21:18ff. for a bigger price which David paid for the whole area which would in future become the temple site.

in our text<sup>8</sup> does it say that *that purchase* took place in the hearing/presence of all the Hittites who had come to that court of law.

And twice it says that that field & cave *were deeded*<sup>9</sup> to Abraham (v.17 & 20)!

Thus, Abraham legally purchased that cave & field – and at a solid price too, so that the sellers couldn't in future complain!

And, with this, the crisis in Abraham's life was now over!

Sarah had died. She needed to be buried. The couple didn't possess any land. Yet, the LORD provided not just by giving a legally owned grave, but by, in the process, also giving the firstfruits of what was to come!

My brother & sister, just imagine what our Bible passage would have meant for Ancient Israel (about 700 years later) there where they were on the brink of conquering that very land of which their forefather had received the firstfruits!

Would they not have gone: "Surely, God *will* help us!"? "Look He has already shown Himself faithful!" "Yes, look at the cave Machpelah!" "Is that not God's pledge to us that we will conquer this whole land!?"

My brother & sister, despite the current world crises – yes, despite your/my personal crises – God has promised, "***Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth***" (Mt 5:5).<sup>10</sup>

Look, is that not why also Peter, in the Holy Spirit, says, "***But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells***" (2 Pt 3:13)?

And was our Lord not referring to your/my homeland when He said, "***Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. <sup>2</sup> In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.***" (Jn 14:1-3)?

You say, "But, pastor, to Abraham God gave Sarah's grave as firstfruits of their possession of all of Canaan!" "What firstfruits has God given us?"

My brother & sister, you & I have the firstfruits of our Lord's resurrection from the dead – firstfruits guaranteeing that you & I will also rise from the dead and inherit our homeland!

Yes, Christ's resurrection is our firstfruits!

Well, here's another firstfruits for you & me!

You see, remember when you first received Christ as Saviour and Lord of your life – remember *that faith* which God had worked in your heart as He made you new!

Well, on top of Christ's resurrection, is it not so that your renewed heart (your faith) is also proof – yes, a guarantee or down-payment, a deposit<sup>11</sup> – of that homeland which will be yours at Christ's return?

---

<sup>8</sup> See verses 10, 11, 12, 16, 18

<sup>9</sup> In Hebrew, *vayyaqom* (וַיַּקֹּם) – a Qal Imperfect 3 Masculine Singular with vav consecutive of the verb *qūm* (קָם), literally: "And the field and cave... *stood up* (were deeded [so e.g., the NIV and NASB]) to Abraham..." Also, cf. in BDAG under meaning 7b "*be established, confirmed, of kingdom* 1 S 24:21 (וַיִּקְּם; Gi v 20); of purchase Lv 27:19, c. הַ pers. *be assured to* 25:30 Gn 23:17, 20" (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). [Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon](#) (pp. 877–879). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

<sup>10</sup> Jesus giving a fuller meaning to Ps 37:11 ***But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.***

<sup>11</sup> cf. 2 Cor 1:21-22 "***...He anointed us, <sup>22</sup> set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.***"

And you know what?

Every time that you & I bury a loved-one – a believer – in the grave here on earth, we do so as Abraham did, i.e., knowing that as he laid Sarah in that piece of land which he possessed, God *will* fulfil His word re that promised homeland!

And remember how Abraham was still living by faith when he died. *He* did not receive the things promised; he only saw them and welcomed them from a distance (cf. Heb 11:13a).<sup>12</sup>

My brother & sister, remember Heb 11:1 *Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*

AMEN (2,752 words excluding footnotes)

---

Also, cf. Eph 1:13-14 “...*Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.*”

<sup>12</sup> *All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.*